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ABSTRACT

The rationale and process for creating a credit-bearing intensive English program (IEP) at Utah State University, a land-grant institution with about 1,000 foreign students, are described. The program evolved from an intensive English language institute whose proficiency-granting process became tedious for staff and administrators. As a result, the proficiency exam previously used was abolished and the program was set up for monitored, gradual, and controlled student passage through intensive English courses and into the full-time university degree program. For budgetary reasons, the program was moved to the Language Department, where the courses began to receive 100 and 200 level undergraduate, elective credit for each of the five courses at all four levels. Arguments of the administration against granting full credit were countered with support from foreign language, English, and other faculty. Curricula were written, and with the advent of a new dean, the program was separated from the Language Department and granted separate academic program status. Additional administration support and challenge has included the invitation for IEP faculty to become involved in research and moves to make the instructors regular faculty members. The program benefits by its credit-bearing status in a number of ways. (MSE)

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A case study:

The IEP* as an academic unit in the university

Susan Carkin

Abstract This paper reviews the rationale and process that created a credit-bearing intensive English program (IEP) at Utah State University, a land-grant institution with around 1,000 international students. Several of the consequences, both anticipated and fortuitious, of granting undergraduate, elective credit for intensive English study are described.

*intensive English program

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A Foreward to ERIC readers

This paper was given at the 22nd Annual Convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in Chicago, on March 10, 1988. It was one of three papers invited by John Staczek, Associate Chair, for the Academic Session of the Program Administration Interest Section.

Introduction

I'm happy John Staczek has titled this session "Three Case Studies." The process of becoming a credit-bearing IEP at Utah State University has been a rather solitary venture for our program, with few network resources or precedent programs to offer support. Not that we didn't obtain a great deal of information from the IEPs at comparative institutions. (Here I should offer a belated thank you for the 2-hour phone conversations with colleagues from Oregon State, Texas A&M, UC Davis and Riverside, Penn State, Rutgers and others.) But in 1981-82 when the College of Humanities was holding informal open meetings on the credit-worthiness of intensive English language courses, there was almost no information on credit-bearing courses in IEPs that we could bring to our discussions. The rationale and procedures that have been shaping the fate of the Intensive English Language Institute (hereafter IELI) at Utah State University may be very unique.

This case study, then, is offered as a description of the process used in our gaining academic credit for all levels of our intensive English program. The same caveats apply to this case study as to all such studies; it raises issues of validity and generalizability. In other words, the processes that IELI undertook, the arguments that we

advanced for credit-bearing status, our organizational history, and the rationale we developed for academic recognition of our students and program may serve other institutions' goals only marginally, or not at all.

I'm willing to risk being anecdotal, however, because if we have many anecdotes we can begin to establish a data base. And if we have a data base, then we have the opportunity to select information that is relevant to our individual programs and goals. In the three years I've directed an IEP, more than anything else from the TESOL profession, I have needed information about comparative programs. In the best of circumstances, the presentations at this session along with the information from the TESOL Self-Studies, would serve as a beginning of a much-needed data base.

IELI Program History

The IELI program came into formal existence in 1971. It offered four levels of instruction, elementary through advanced, on the same quarterly (10 week) schedule used by the university. We were a program in the Department of Languages and Philosophy. Our director had a shared position between IELI and Languages, in which he directed IELI, taught in it, and taught Linguistics in the Language Department. The program had a separate budget within the total budget of the Language Department.

Until 1975, IELI was a proficiency-oriented intensive English program. Students could complete our program and enter the university upon passing our in-house Proficiency Exam. All students took the IELI Proficiency Exam at the beginning and the end of each quarter.

Those who didn't pass it had to repeat classes or meet the university's TOEFL minimum of 500 (then), and those who did were "judged to possess the minimum level of English language competence required to engage in a full-time academic program at U.S.U., and [were] recommended for Admission to the Office of Admissions or to the Graduate School" (Lackstrom: 1).

Operating a proficiency-granting program became an enormous headache for both the staff and the administrators. The anxiety level of the students made classroom instruction difficult as the tension would build from mid-quarter on. Students would suddenly disappear in the middle of the quarter to study on their own, having decided that taking the TOEFL offered them a better chance of entering the university. Our own in-house proficiency exam was often viewed by our students as an impediment to their educational goals, and as a way of sustaining our program financially. And of course, "the fact that the examination [was] a 'proficiency examination' precluded the possibility that it would cover what the students had been taught in any direct or obvious way" (2).

Our director at that time, John Lackstrom, wrote a formal proposal that IELI abolish the concept of proficiency and replace it with "a concept and a program of monitored, gradual and controlled passage through the courses of the I.E.L.I. and into a full-time university degree program" (4). The proficiency exam was abolished, and an initial-arrival placement exam was developed, closely tied to the levels and courses in IELI. After being placed by the exam, students moved from one level to another by passing achievement tests and final exams in their classes, the usual procedure followed in

college level courses. The university agreed to accept students who passed the advanced course, level 4, as having met the minimal language standard for full-time university work.

As a result of the proficiency proposal, students who applied to and were accepted at the university on their academic credentials were admitted as fully matriculated students upon registration whether they were in full-time, part-time, or no courses in IELI. Students received grades of Incomplete on their transcript until they were recommended as proficient. Upon passing Level 4, they received 15 credits, with the "grade" of pass noted on their transcripts. Such a grade could be applied toward an undergraduate degree in any major which accepted undergraduate, elective, pass-fail credit. There was, almost from the beginning of our program, a precedent for granting credit for ESL study.

In a budgetary move in the late 1970s, the administration of our program was moved under the direction of the Department Head of the Language Department. The Department Head saw no reason why ESL courses should not offer credit in a fashion similar to foreign language credit, and in 1981 began the process to acquire 100 and 200 level undergraduate, elective credit for each of the five IELI courses at all four levels (beginning through advanced).

A Process Report: Becoming Credit-granting

From the pass-fail, 15 credit base, the proponents for credit for intensive langauge study had to argue that every course, not just the final level of our program, was credit-worthy. Since we were in the Language Department, there was dialogue with language professors on

subjects such as testing, methods, student progress and outcomes. The Department Head invited the Dean of the College of Humanities to attend a meeting on credit for IELI classes, and to bring any concerns he had to the discussion.

The IELI staff and a number of supportive foreign language teachers attended this meeting with the Dean and the Department Head. The Dean raised the first objection: foreign languages teach higher and more complex grammar than ESL classes. We countered with examples of where the past perfect was taught in the French curriculum versus where it was taught in IELI. We discussed the kinds of performances expected of students who fulfill a year of foreign langauge study versus the performances of those who fulfill a year of intensive English study.

This line of discussion raised his second objection: that the goal of foreign language study was access to the literature of a country or culture, while the goal of intensive English study was utilitarian. We concurred that earning undergraduate and advanced degrees was utilitarian, as was reading the literatures of business, engineering, physics, irrigation engineering, sociology, and agriculture, to name but a few, as well as becoming proficient in the socio-cultural expectations of an academic society in a new culture. A language professor also pointed out that he didn't prepare students for literary study so much as he prepared them for the summer-in-France program.

The third objection raised by the dean is the most-often debated one on U.S. campuses, namely, that ESL should be viewed as having

remedial status, because language proficiency is a prerequisite for admission to most universities. This is a somewhat technical argument at USU because international students are accepted as fully matriculated students on the basis of their academic credentials. I-20s and acceptance letters state that students who do not have TOEFL scores of 500/550 are required to take the Placement Test upon arrival, which will determine their programs in IELI and the start of their study in their majors. In short, we argued that prerequisite and remedial are two different statuses, agreeing that ESL is prerequisite to university study, but also worthy of university credit, hence not remedial, in the same way that foreign language study is worthy of university credit.

That particular dean was probably unconvinced by our arguments that IELI courses should be offered for credit. However, there were other factors that persuaded him not to oppose the issue. Like all deans, he was interested in SCHs--student credit hours, the academic coin-of-the-realm. If 100 international students received 15 credits per quarter for their 5 IELI classes, and if those approximately 1500 credit hours were fairly constant across 4 quarters, his college would generate 6,000 more SCHs per year, nothing to oppose as long as SCHs have some bearing on resource allocation.

So encouraged, the IELI staff wrote course curricula, and began the procedures to earn the courses recognition as credit-bearing. At the college curriculum meeting, our colleagues in Foreign Languages were helpful in explaining the instructional similarities and goals of the two disciplines. When the credit issue was examined by the university curriculum committee, we had support from the Foreign

Language Department as well as the English Department. The English Department argued against assessing remedial status to the ESL courses, and pointed out that they did not assign ESL writers to their remedial writing courses as a matter of policy. Our courses passed this review with only one member of the Educational Policies Committee voting against it.

Within the College of Humanities, colleagues in English and Languages were instrumental in providing support for credit; in other colleges, colleagues with international experience were also supportive of credit-bearing status for intensive ESL courses. Knowledgeable colleagues clearly smoothed the way for IELI to grant credit.

In 1985 a new dean was appointed in the College of Humanities. He wanted comparative data on the administrative structure and program size at comparable institutions, on student-teacher ratios in IEPs, on part-time and full-time teaching ratios, on salaries, on tenure and promotion, on faculty status. Since there was no data base with answers, we called a number of programs (some included in the "thank yous" at the beginning of this paper), and got some informal information through phone interviews. As a result of this information, the Dean separated IELI and its budget from the Language Department. We have been an independent program in the College of Humanities, with a Director and Assistant Director answering directly to the Dean, since Fall, 1985.

As an intensive program, we probably have no fewer goals to achieve than we did before we became an independent credit-granting

program. We now have a proposal before the university administration with options for varying degrees of budgetary autonomy. Our program is clearly understaffed and underbudgeted, to which our annual deficit attests. In order to hire additional staff, we must compete with the needs of other departments for scarce institutional resources.

The IELI staff has a quite peculiar academic status in the university. The same dean who thought foreign languages taught more complex grammar also thought that the IELI teachers should be changed from professional to a kind of faculty status peculiar to USU: Faculty 2 status is described in the University Code as designated for faculty who teach courses at the remedial, low and intermediate levels. This status is supposed to resemble regular Faculty status, without tenure or sabbaticals. We receive annual appointments as lecturers, and regular health and retirement benefits. This status also carries three promotional categories, from lecturer to senior and principal lecturer, so we are reviewed by a committee not unlike a tenure committee, and awarded promotions based on our professional performances.

Our current dean has invited us to involve ourselves in research, and expressed his willingness to take our professional records of teaching, research and service to the administration with the request that we become regular Faculty. The full-time staff teach 45 hours a year, 55 with summer added, so time for research is almost impossible to find. But it has begun. It is my impression that the staff is both challenged and encouraged by Dean's support of the program.

Our efforts to find our own best niche in the university go on. But as this process continues, we are actors in much of it. That's

the major difference between then and now. A major role in the changes we've experienced since 1981 has been played by our credit-granting status. IELI students are esteemed by the institution in the same ways as other university students. As a result of credit status, a number of benefits are distributed through the university: the institution receives a return from the state on SCHs, so it benefits; in a similar fashion, the College and IELI benefit from recorded SCHs, and the international students in our program benefit by enjoying all the privileges of regular student status, from ID cards and free health service to intramural sports and campus social activities. Even in the classroom, the IELI faculty and students enjoy a much more effective teaching-learning atmosphere, having eliminated the notion of proficiency--or at least relegated it to the Testing Office which administers the TOEFL at the university.

That's a part of the ongoing story at USU. As program administrators, where do we go from here?

The ESL profession lacks a data base whereby anecdotal information could be systematically gathered to provide descriptions of other programs, comparisons made, requests and decisions defended, and so on. Until we have this kind of information at our fingertips, we will continue to report local stories of innovations, successes and failures. We will have to rely on our internal resources and credibility--not bad notions at all--in our quest for fair recognition of our students and our profession. But while internal resources are of undeniable importance, studies and information on what is happening in comparable programs always informs the decision-making process in

higher education. Higher ed is extremely sensitive to everything that contributes to its reputation and stature, locally, nationally, and internationally. A data base would help the ESL profession make a contribution to our institutions.

Our institutions are in sore need of academic liaisons to represent not only the needs of international students, but also the resources of these students. The internationalization of the curriculum is an issue being raised in many universities these days, as awareness of our global interdependence and the roles for universities in an ever-shrinking world increase. The credit-granting status of IEPs is one small step to be taken towards allowing the full enfranchisement of international students as individuals who possess diversity and viewpoints which we value highly on our campuses. Similarly, the enfranchisement of international students in American higher education holds the promise of enfranchising the ESL profession as it is taught and esteemed in higher education, allowing the ESL professionals the access to perform as visionaries, instead of reactionaries, and offer expertise to American institutions as they move into the twenty-first century with ever-growing numbers of international students.

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